

## **University of South Carolina Union**

Act 629 - Summary Reports on Institutional Effectiveness

Fiscal Year 2001 - 2002

### **Introduction**

This report includes: General Education, Achievement of Students Transferring from Two to Four-Year Institutions, and Policies and Procedures to Ensure that Academic Programs Support the Economic Development Needs in the State by Providing a Technologically Skilled Workforce.

A reporting schedule for USC Columbia and Regional Campuses can be found at <http://kudzu.ipr.sc.edu/IEReports/a629schd.htm>.

### **Assessment of General Education**

The primary mission of USC Union is to provide students with the first two years of a university education, preparing them to go on to a baccalaureate degree granting institution. In the process of earning a baccalaureate degree, many students earn an associate degree, and USCU offers the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science. Within these two degrees, we help our students acquire skills and knowledge in the following areas: communication, mathematics, literature and the arts, society and the individual, science and technology, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. We define general education as the content of these two degree programs.

#### **Assessment Methods:**

- Transcript analysis and tracking
- Grade spread and GPA data
- Student evaluation of their courses
- Faculty self-evaluation of their teaching
- Class visitation by peers
- Student, faculty, and alumni surveys
- Course portfolios
- Focus group discussion
- Performance Indicators of Act 359

Further description of these assessment methods can be found in the USCU Assessment Plan at [http://www.sc.edu/union/inform/Assessment\\_Plan\\_2-00.htm](http://www.sc.edu/union/inform/Assessment_Plan_2-00.htm).

## **Assessment Results:**

### **TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS**

In a study of our spring 2001 graduates (n=24), we looked at the courses taken in each of the four fundamental areas of writing, oral communication, mathematics, and computer literacy. The courses we offer include ENGL 101 and 102, THSP 140, and various courses in MATH, STAT, and CSCE. Second, we counted the number of courses taken, other than those listed above, in the major fields of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional areas, such as business or nursing.

Most of our students take writing (100%), speech (88%), math (100%), and computer science (92%), even though all are not required for our associate degrees. Advisors are encouraging students to take courses in these basic, SACS-recognized areas. Secondly, we have good balance in other liberal-arts areas. Only one or two natural science courses are required in our degree programs, but the average taken is 3.3. The average for the humanities is 4.6, and for the social sciences, 7.4. An average of 1.8 professional courses were taken, an appropriately small number at the associate degree level.

### **TRACKING STUDY**

We selected a sample of students who had been enrolled in USCU in spring 2000 with at least 30 cumulative hours earned and who were enrolled at a four-year campus in spring 2001. The cumulative GPA was recorded for each semester and averaged 2.8 in 2000 and 2.8 in 2001. The identity of the means indicates that USCU prepares its students well for subsequent study at a four-year institution.

In another tracking study, a sample of 70 students were identified who were enrolled at USCU in fall 1999 or spring 2000, who had earned at least 30 hours, and who had gone on to take courses either at USC Spartanburg, USC Aiken, or USC Columbia. Some of these students had formally changed campus, but others had taken these subsequent courses as transient students. The GPAs were calculated only for the specific hours referenced, and the averages are unweighted arithmetic means.

| Department or Academic Area | USCU |     | 4-Year |
|-----------------------------|------|-----|--------|
| HUMANITIES                  |      |     |        |
| ENGL                        | n=8  | 3.1 | 3.2    |

|                         |                      |     |     |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----|-----|
|                         | student<br>s         |     |     |
| HIST                    | n=14<br>student<br>s | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| THSP                    | n=3<br>student<br>s  | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| ALL HUMANITIES          | n=26<br>student<br>s | 3.0 | 2.7 |
| SCIENCES                |                      |     |     |
| BIOL                    | n=4<br>student<br>s  | 2.0 | 1.9 |
| ECON                    | n=3<br>student<br>s  | 3.8 | 2.3 |
| ED                      | n=2<br>student<br>s  | 2.8 | 3.0 |
| GINT                    | n=2<br>student<br>s  | 3.0 | 2.5 |
| PSYC                    | n=12<br>student<br>s | 2.8 | 3.0 |
| SOCY                    | n=4<br>student<br>s  | 3.4 | 3.5 |
| ALL NATURAL<br>SCIENCES | n=54<br>student<br>s | 2.3 | 2.7 |
| ALL SOCIAL SCIENCES     | n=34<br>student<br>s | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| ALL SCIENCES            | n=68<br>student<br>s | 2.6 | 2.9 |

| QUANTITATIVE     |                      |     |     |
|------------------|----------------------|-----|-----|
| Business         | n=5<br>student<br>s  | 3.0 | 2.9 |
| MATH             | n=7<br>student<br>s  | 2.9 | 2.1 |
| ALL QUANTITATIVE | n=21<br>student<br>s | 2.9 | 2.3 |
| ALL STUDENTS     | n=70<br>student<br>s | 2.8 | 2.8 |

In all, 70 students were identified who could be matched, at least to broad academic area, in the courses they took at USCU and at a 4-year campus. Looking at these students and at these “matched” courses only, we see that the average GPA earned at USCU was 2.8, and the average GPA earned in subsequent courses at the 4-year campus was also 2.8. These results show that USCU is preparing its students well for higher level study. In almost all of the more specific academic areas where we have four or more students, the comparison between campuses is also the same or is just a few tenths of a grade point higher or lower. The one exception is in the area of mathematics.

In a more focused study of our prenursing students, we considered all students who took Human Physiology (BIOL U242) during the spring of 1999, 2000, or 2001, and who continued in nursing at USCS.

|                       | CGPA at end of time at<br>USCU | SGPA first semester at<br>USCS | CGPA<br>4/02 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Mean<br>GPA<br>(n=15) | 3.0                            | 2.7                            | 2.9          |

On average, we see a small initial decrease in performance, but overall, the move from a small to a large campus entails a decrease of only one tenth of a point.

Another important subpopulation of our student body includes first-generation, low-income, and/or disabled students served by our TRIO funded Opportunity Scholars Program. These students are especially at risk, and the OSP program is designed to provide support services that encourage success.

One performance objective is that at least 60% of all participants will earn a grade point average of 2.0 or better. For the Fall semester 75% of the participants earned a grade point average of 2.0 or better. Another performance objective is that at least 40% of the 150 participants in the OSP program (excluding transfers, graduates, and those who exit for reasons of health or death) will be retained at USC Union from one year to the next. For midyear, the retention rate was 91%. A third objective states that at least 30% of all retained OSP participants will graduate with the Associate in Arts or the Associate in Sciences Degree. 40 OSP participants were classified as beyond freshman status as of 09/01/01. 24 OSP participants were scheduled to graduate in Spring 2002. This represents 60% of those eligible participants. Finally, at least 40% of all second year eligible OSP participants are expected to transfer (including those students who have been retained and/or who have graduated) into a baccalaureate program of study. The graduation and transfer rate for 2000-2001 was 67% of those participants considered sophomores. The graduation and transfer rate for 2001-2002 will be available in August 2002.

## **GRADE SPREAD**

Every semester, a campus grade spread is tabulated, showing the proportion of each grade given in each department. The average for all departments, fall 2001, is given below.

| %A | %B | %C | %D | %F,WF | %I | %S | %U | %W | %other | Total # |
|----|----|----|----|-------|----|----|----|----|--------|---------|
| 32 | 29 | 14 | 7  | 6     | 1  | 1  |    | 5  | 5      | 1001    |

For the previous several years, the percentage of A and B grades varied between 40% and 50%, but this figure has gradually risen over the last three semesters and was 61% in the fall, leading to concerns over grade inflation. On the other hand, comparisons of campus GPAs throughout the university show that Union is not out of line (Union=2.7 for fall '01, Columbia=3.2, other Regional Campuses=2.7).

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

Each semester, students conduct a course evaluation in each course. This survey asks students to report their satisfaction with and to comment on the mechanics and the atmosphere of the course, the availability of the instructor, how well prepared the instructor was, and how much material was covered and how prepared the student felt for subsequent coursework. For all items, the campus average was 3.4 or higher where 1=very dissatisfied and 4=very satisfied. The last item on the survey asks, "everything considered, how would

you rate this course?" The mean for spring 2001 was 4.4, and the mean for fall 2001 was 4.3 (1=poor and 5=excellent).

Each year, students, faculty, and staff nominate faculty members to be considered for selection as USCU's Distinguished Teacher of the Year. This year, 30 instructors were eligible for nomination, and 19 (63%) were nominated at least once. This process represents a kind of "faculty evaluation," and we are pleased to find that a majority of the faculty have this kind of impact on so many students.

## **FACULTY SELF EVALUATION**

Every spring, full-time faculty prepare an annual report of their efforts and accomplishments, and one part of that report is a faculty self-evaluation of their teaching. Faculty consider their goals and objectives, the strategies that they use to reach these objectives, new efforts made during the year, and successes and failures. Both the course evaluations (above) and the self evaluations reveal improvements and new teaching efforts that can be made. These materials are also discussed between the instructor and the Academic Dean, and additional improvements arise there.

Some of the efforts emphasized in reports this year include the promotion of active learning, the relation of course material to experience outside of class, the usefulness of course material in the world of work and in life, and the use of information technology.

## **STUDENT/FACULTY SURVEYS**

We periodically survey enrolled students, alumni, faculty, and staff in an effort, in part, to measure satisfaction with many features of the educational program. For all items, the average responses over the last 10 years range between "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree." In these surveys, we can recognize the need for more different kinds of tutorial help and for a greater variety of courses, especially upper-division.

One question from our standard survey asks if USCU "helped you develop" in the areas named in our "Student Objectives" published in the USCU Bulletin, <http://www.sc.edu/bulletin/Union/University.html>. The average response is that USCU is helping students to achieve all these academic and developmental goals.

Since fall 1997, Admissions has been asking those students who come into that office to withdraw, change campus, or to get a "request for transcript" form, to complete a withdrawal survey in which we ask why the student is leaving and was the student satisfied with our programs and faculty.

By far, the majority of departing students leave because they have achieved their academic goals, and it is time for them to move on (70%, n=70 total responses). Some had personal problems that forced them to leave (24%). Only one comment showed dissatisfaction with the quality of the teaching and one with the learning environment. The evaluation of our educational program was 3.5 on a scale from 1=very dissatisfied to 4=very satisfied. The evaluation of the faculty was 3.6.

During 1994-95, we added a question to our regular course evaluation form and asked, "If you could change one thing about USC Union, its courses, activities, facilities, administration, what would it be? If you have answered this question in another class, please describe a second change that you would like to make." This question is not a leading question, as most survey items are, and so should allow us to identify institutional weaknesses that are most obvious and most in the minds of our students.

Last year, by far the most requests made for changes to our academic programs were for additional courses (25%, see table below, and note that 21% of the comments were to change nothing; USCU was perfect). Students also requested an expanded evening program (22 requests, 3%), more understanding on the part of instructors (10 requests, 1%), and a more lenient absence/tardy policy (8 requests, 1%). There was no more frequent request in the area of academics.

| Change requested              | Number of Requests<br>Fall & Spring, 2001 | % of Total Requests<br>(not 100% due to rounding) |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| More courses                  | 186                                       | 25  |
| Schedule changes              | 59  | 8   |
| Changes in teaching           | 73  | 10  |
| Changes in student activities | 119                                       | 16  |
| Changes in library            | 5   | 1   |
| Changes in advisement         | 9   | 1   |
| Administrative changes        | 38  | 5   |
| Bookstore changes             | 38  | 5   |
| Changes in facilities         | 67  | 9   |
| "Change nothing"              | 154                                       | 21  |
| Total                         | 748                                       |   |

Quoting from our USC Union Placement Policy (2/12/99 <http://www.sc.edu/union/handbook/Placement%20Policy.htm>). "USCU is committed to the concept of teaching basic college skills across the curriculum. These skills are reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematical computation, and computer literacy. Instructors outside these specific disciplines give basic instruction, where appropriate, in the development of these skills and in their

application within the course discipline. All freshmen are urged to attend to these components as they arise throughout their course schedules, and thereby strengthen their academic skills."

In 2000, we asked faculty and staff, "Do YOU help students improve these basic college skills, either in the classroom or in other settings (e.g. clubs, activities, work-study, advisement, counseling)?" Faculty and staff responded using a scale from 1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree.

average score

(total forms returned = 29)

1.7\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their reading skills.

1.6\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their writing skills.

2.1\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their speaking skills.

1.6\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their listening skills.

2.2\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their mathematics skills.

1.7\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their computer skills.

1.5\_\_\_\_\_ I help students improve their critical thinking/analytical skills.

Clearly, writing skills are being developed outside English classes, and even speaking skills and math skills are being developed to some degree across the curriculum. This is an area in which we would like to continue to improve.

### **Use of Assessment Results:**

Our Opportunity Scholars Program, funded by a federal TRIO grant, has been renewed. This program provides tutorial assistance to member students, especially in the area of writing and study skills. Specific disciplinary tutoring is available in the areas of chemistry, psychology, government, biology, sociology, history, and computer science. An academic software program is available that will self diagnose specific academic needs in English, Math, Reading, Grammar and Science.

The full-time Program Assistant's office has been moved into the OSP computer lab so she will be available to students who need assistance. (She is a Microsoft Certified Professional and also has Novell CNA and CNE certification and computer/printer maintenance certification with IBM, HP and Compaq.) She assists the students with word processing, Internet searching, career exploration and other items as needed.

Workshops have been presented in the areas of computer concepts, getting around on the internet, adjustment to college and preparation to transfer to a four-year institution, study skills, and "how I study" (by successful students).



We also have an institutionally funded tutorial program in the areas of reading and writing and selected disciplinary areas, open to all students.

The Higher Education Center has been completed in Laurens. We are sharing the facility with Piedmont Technical College and are collaborating more fully with that institution. Our course offerings are being expanded. Satellite communications is available for the first time, giving access to distance education from Columbia, Union, and other sites within the University. The Student in the University (UNIV 101) and mathematics will be offered for the first time in Laurens during the day. Our Opportunity Scholars Program will provide student support for the first time in Laurens.

Our Continuing Education office organized a critical thinking seminar for all faculty during the spring.

Individual faculty members regularly try new strategies to get their materials across to students. Instructors have developed new study guides to help organize student effort and to make their study more focused and active. Group projects, the acting out of concepts, role playing, games, journals, interviews, and debates are used get students actively involved. Students are asked to search the current media for examples of concepts discussed in class. They are also expected to relate classroom learning to their own personal experiences outside of class. In English, a special departmental focus has been on the problem of plagiarism.

Our Spanish course has been rescheduled from a twice per week class to a MWF schedule, giving these students more frequent exposure to the material.

For the first time, we are offering evening geology, and we are scheduling a natural science in our evening program every semester.

We have hired a new instructor of mathematics and have substantially modified the grading procedures in our beginning math course, MATH 1111, raising the standards in that course. MATH 221 is a course for education majors. For the first time, all tests and the final examination will be in PRAXIS I/PPST form (40 questions with a 60 minute time limit and no calculators for the paper and pencil test). The scale is based on the minimal passing score on the PRAXIS I/PPST Mathematics test for S.C. Both textbooks used for the course have all of the answers to the homework; the PRAXIS I prep text we use even has detailed solutions of the problems. The graded homework will be additional handouts that the instructor will prepare. We have also conducted PRAXIS I/PPST "cram sessions" the day before the test. This will ensure that our pass rates on the PRAXIS I/PPST Mathematics test will remain at or close to 100%. We are revising our math placement test so that it better matches the content of our

courses and so that it will place students more accurately. We have begun to schedule the beginning math class to meet five days per week, giving students both more exposures to the material and more total class time. Finally, this summer we are conducting a 4-day "bridge course" for underprepared students (new and continuing) that will cover the basics of arithmetic and a 3-day pre-pharmacology mathematics workshop for our pre-Nursing students

In sociology this spring, the instructor had students submit 3 critical thought papers relating to the material in the book. By the third submission, most students were no longer merely repeating what the text said or simply giving their opinion on the issue.

In SOCY 340, Social Problems, students did not use a textbook but worked from the primary literature. They read 3 recent publications, 2 by sociologists, all dealing with current social problems. Students learned the "sociological perspective" from the authors' approach to the issue examined rather than from reading a description of it in a textbook. For each class students read several chapters in a book and submitted a paper answering questions that required them to view the material critically. In SOCY 301, Sex Roles, in place of one of the weekly class meetings, students gathered first hand data on the subject (for ex. observing a middle school classroom or observing interaction between males and females, females and females, and males and males in the student lounge) or they did library research on the topic. They then presented their findings in the other scheduled class time and related the findings to material in the textbook.

Basic courses in computer literacy and programming have long been offered at USCU, but more and more computer applications and information technology are finding their ways throughout the curriculum. In psychology, we use Blackboard courseware. In biology, we use an open-access web site. In religion, the study sites provided by textbook publishers are being emphasized, and the instructor is developing a site on Reason and Faith for the fall. Course materials and study aids are made available. Information is presented, assignments are made, and students are encouraged to submit assignments electronically. Tutorial help is provided through email. Links to relevant sources of Web information are provided, and research and analysis are otherwise encouraged.

### **Achievement of Students Transferring from Two to Four-Year Institutions**

Transfer reports for the USC Regional Campuses can be found at <http://kudzu.ipr.sc.edu/IEReports/transfers/tran2002.doc>

## **Policies and Procedures to Ensure that Academic Programs Support the Economic Development Needs in the State by Providing a Technologically Skilled Workforce**

The primary mission of USC Union is to provide students with the first two years of a university education, preparing them to go on to a baccalaureate degree granting institution. In the process of earning a baccalaureate degree, many students earn an associate degree, and USCU offers the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science. Within these two degrees, faculty help students acquire skills and knowledge in the following areas: communication, mathematics, literature and the arts, society and the individual, science and technology, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. One of the goals in the science and technology section of USC Union's General Education Assessment Plan is that students should have the ability to use computers across the curriculum for self-instruction, for collection and retrieval of data, and for word processing, modeling, simulation, and problem solving. Indicators of success include: student performance at USCU; student performance in upper-level courses; especially on the Spartanburg or Columbia campuses; student feedback, faculty feedback and alumni feedback. Assessment methods include: transcript analysis and tracking; grade distribution and GPA data; student evaluation of their courses; faculty evaluation of their teaching; class visitation by peers; student surveys; faculty surveys; alumni surveys; and focus group discussion.